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NEWS

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HALL HITS STATE DEPARTMENT ON EAST TIMOR RESPONSE

WASHINGTON--Citing recent contacts with Timorese sources, Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio) accused the State Department of uncritically adopting Indonesian policy and ignoring the tragic suffering in East Timor.

East Timor, a former Portuguese colony, is a largely Roman Catholic island territory near Australia. It was forcibly annexed by Indonesia in 1975.

Hall aimed his comments at a letter he received from State Department Assistant Secretary W. Tapley Bennett, Jr., who responded to a letter concerning East Timor signed by 105 House members.

That letter, drafted by Hall, called attention to the latest military offensive by Indonesia against Fretilin (the Timorese resistance group), sought Administration support for greater access to East Timor by the Red Cross, and urged the Administration to work with Portugal and Australia to develop diplomatic initiatives to address the problems of East Timor.

Hall charged that the State Department response "could have been written by the Indonesians," and expressed disappointment that the Administration "completely ignored the call by 105 Congressmen for constructive diplomacy on the status of East Timor."

The State Department response referred to renewed fighting which broke out in August between Timorese and the Indonesian military "apparently at Fretilin initiative."

However, Timorese refugees arriving recently in Portugal informed Hall that a large Indonesian military build-up began in early August, and Indonesians commandeered trucks from Timorese in order to move troops out into the countryside.

There were also eyewitness accounts of air transports landing at the

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airport in Dili to deliver significant numbers of elite Indonesian Red Beret troops and naval craft unloading other Indonesian troops before the fighting began.

Refugees reported that the local Indonesian authorities announced that an offensive was going to begin, that a 6:00 p.m. curfew was in effect, and that no one should look for East Timorese who disappeared.

Hall disputed other points in the letter:

• "The Indonesian Armed Forces Commander in a Christmas Day message reiterated an offer of humane treatment to any Fretilin who voluntarily gave up their armed struggle. An earlier Indonesian Government offer of amnesty to surrendering insurgents also remains in effect."

Shortly before the August fighting, the same commander was quoted as saying he would "crush" Fretilin and that there would be "no mercy." He also said, "This time, the armed forces will use every means at its disposal in the operation to wipe out Fretilin remnants." Amnesty International has reported that some Fretilin who have surrendered have either been killed or have disappeared. Refugees in Portugal confirmed this to Hall.

• "We have reason to believe that the Indonesian forces...are attempting to minimize the impact of the fighting on non-combatants."

Hall has received reports from Timorese refugees of retaliation massacres, including one report from the Viqueque area in which 200 were allegedly killed. Refugees informed Hall of disappearances and murders by the Indonesians.

• "The Indonesian government...plans to continue giving major emphasis to economic and social development in East Timor."

In the eight years following the forcible annexation of East Timor by Indonesia, military operations against Timorese farmers, have contributed to the death of over 100,000, decimating about one-seventh of the pre-invasion population.

An aide to Hall recently returned from Portugal where he met with refugees who had just come from East Timor. He also talked to Portuguese officials who are working on diplomatic solutions to the problems in East Timor.

The State Department letter is attached.

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United States Department of State

Washington, D.C. 20520

JANUARY 20 1984

Dear Mr. Hall:

The White House has asked that I reply to the letter which you and a number of your House colleagues wrote to the President on December 15, expressing your concern over the situation in East Timor.

This Administration continues to follow closely the situation in East Timor, and it remains an element in our diplomatic dialogue with the Government of Indonesia. We continue to place greatest emphasis on doing what we can to help improve the lot of the Timorese people, who have indeed suffered years of strife.

As you have noted, following a period of some months when there was no fighting in East Timor and contacts were established between members of the Fretilin insurgency and Indonesian Government officials, fighting again broke out in East Timor in August, apparently at Fretilin initiative. Since that time, in an effort to reestablish security, the Indonesian Government has increased its military presence in East Timor and renewed at least some offensive operations, particularly in the sparsely populated Eastern portions of the province.

We regret the resumption of fighting which has brought renewed hardship to some in East Timor. I would note, however, that we have no credible reports indicating that the fighting has caused widespread privation. We have expressed to the Indonesian Government our hope that the fighting will be kept at the minimum level necessary to insure the safety and security of the population at large, and we have reason to believe that the Indonesian forces, in conducting their operations, are attempting to minimize the impact of the fighting on non-combatants. The Indonesian Armed Forces Commander in a Christmas Day message reiterated an offer of humane treatment to any Fretilin who voluntarily gave up their armed struggle. An earlier Indonesian Government offer of amnesty to surrendering insurgents also remains in effect.

The Honorable
Tony Hall,
House of Representatives.

The Administration joins you in applauding the activities in East Timor of the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] and Catholic Relief Services [CRS], which have contributed importantly to the welfare of the people of East Timor. As you are aware, the United States through USAID funds CRS' East Timor project, and we also contribute significantly to the ICRC effort there.

We have expressed to the appropriate Indonesian authorities our hope that, when security conditions permit, representatives of all three involved international organizations as well as other responsible observers be given all necessary access to East Timor to conduct and monitor their own programs and other developments of legitimate international interest. At this point, the ICRC has access to Dili, East Timor's capital, for tracing and repatriation activities, and to Atauro Island for health and nutrition programs. Resumed access to other parts of East Timor for protection and possible relief activities is currently under discussion with the Indonesian Government. UNICEF has had recent access to Dili, and CRS enjoys routine access to the Western part of the territory, where its project site is located.

In this context, I would emphasize that all of the involved international organizations, while adhering to the principles which guide their activities worldwide, have operated with the concurrence of the Indonesian Government, which we believe plans to continue giving major emphasis to economic and social development in East Timor.

I hope that this information will be of value to you and your colleagues. If the Department can be of any additional help to you on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

W. Tapley Bennett, Jr.

W. Tapley Bennett, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs